Alaskan idea for Iraq

Edmonton Journal (Alberta)

May 3, 2003 Saturday Final Edition

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Section: Opinion; Pg. A18; Opinion

Length: 243 words

Body

AN EDITORIAL IN THE LOS ANGELES TIMES:

What do Alaska and Iraq have in common? No, not climate. And no, not wildlife -- though it is conceivably possible to mistake a camel for a moose.
Los Angeles TImesThe answer is oil. Which is why the Bush administration is thinking, quite cleverly, of using Alaska's Permanent Fund as a model for distributing wealth in Iraq.

The Alaska program sets aside 25 per cent of the state's tax revenue from oil production. By implementing a revenue-sharing program like the Alaska fund -- which last year paid $1,540 to every man, woman and child who met residency requirements -- the U.S. could dispel one of the harshest charges against the war: that it was motivated by a desire to let the petroleum industry and international financiers plunder the desert nation's most important product.

More important, it would quickly pump money into the hands of cash-starved Iraqi citizens. That in turn would help create small businesses and other financial ventures, diffusing the often anti-democratic rage spawned by economic helplessness …

Whatever Iraqi government comes to power will probably not be thrilled at the prospect of people getting money the state could have claimed for itself. But Iraqis need look no further than Saddam Hussein's palaces to be skeptical of that attitude. By encouraging Iraq to give its citizens a stake in that to which they're entitled, the U.S. would be enhancing the chances of democracy.

Load-Date: May 3, 2003

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